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## Book Review

## Buckley Succeeds as Novelist

By HOLMES ALEXANDER

Buckley, William F.  
Soc 4.01.2 Saving the Queen

Columnist William F. Buckley Jr. often comes around to confirming my belief in the inequality of mankind. Bill's latest feat is a nuclear whodunit, *Saving the Queen*, published by Doubleday.

I've never been able to keep an up-to-date list of this guy's accomplishments. All I know is that he's a yachtsman, journalist, editor, belletrist, TV maestro, probably the best debater in the land, and now he turns up as a fictioneer. Is that fair? Why should this friend of mine have all the talents, as well as having a

"Saving the Queen"

By William F. Buckley Jr.

Doubleday

248 pages, \$7.95

gifted brother who's a serious novelist and another who's in the Senate? All men are created equal—says who!

Not only is Bill loaded with many proficiencies, but he has a disarming air and sunny disposition which make it quite impossible for his colleagues to be jealous. The poisoned chalice of envy he will never quaff. When he was less well known, the proper English that he speaks was regarded as affectation, but his wit and warmth were his saving grace from the beginning.

Some years back he and I met in a changesburg dining room, and he ordered the wine. "My God," Bill yelped when the waiter brought the bottle. "It's billed!" He sent for another order which was room temperature, and managed to soothe the waiter's injured feelings with humor. His book has a similar scene on page 15, except that the companion is a boor and the waiter is not spoken kindly to.

As a fictioneer Buckley starts, I think, with the disadvantage of a writer widely known for his literary style. It is the handicap that a funnyman, say Art Schwalz, might labor under. Everyone expects him to make jokes, and will begin to laugh before he opens his mouth. Thus the only review I've read states of an elegant style which just isn't there. Very few novelists write like

"The skilled narrator, as Bill turns out to be, gives us action and character. As Siegfried Sassoon once wrote of a fox-hunter, 'He rides across the country as if it weren't there.' The novelist who does that has style enough, and it doesn't draw attention to itself.

The book is a spoof, a delightful one, about Blackford Oakes, a deep-cover CIA agent who goes to England to see who's leaking nuclear secrets to the Russians. Suspicion points to the lovely, 31-year-old Queen Caroline, but Oakes clears her, catches and destroys the villain, and gets a royal kiss. Oakes is a witness before Vice President Rockefeller's 1975 investigation of the CIA, but the flashback action is in 1951 with the Korean War and McCarthyism going strong.

If there's any serious commentary in the book, I think it's Buckley's hindsight evaluation of Joe McCarthy which does not differ much from his evaluation during Joe's lifetime. Bill has two Russians discussing their country's efforts to swipe nuclear formulas. "The proddings of McCarthy," says one, "have resulted

in immobilizing many of our operatives. They have not been detected, but they are greatly neutralized."

In another place where Joe is mentioned, Buckley has his hero meditate, "We might in secure conscience lie and steal in order to secure the escape of human beings from misery and death; Stalin has no right to lie and steal in order to bring misery and death to others."

Here Buckley has given us the right retort to the moral shock we feel when the CIA is caught doing what is wrong and illegal. After all, motives do count. There is a difference between actions taken to enslave people and actions taken to provide and guard their freedom. Nice going, Bill.

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